



THE BEREHA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

The Gospel & History

“A Gospel which cares only for the apostolic proclamation and denies that it either can or should be tested for its historical antecedents, is really only a thinly veiled gnosticism or docetism and, however much it may continue to move by a borrowed momentum, will prove ultimately to be no Gospel.” – C. F. D. Moule, *The Phenomenon of the New Testament* (SCM Press, 1967), 80f., in N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Fortress Press, 2003), 23

Wisdom as Obedience

“Since wisdom as Torah obedience in this life sometimes results not in earthly bliss but in earthly suffering, the motivation for wisdom/obedience is not simply that things will go better in this life, but that one will be rewarded in the coming age.” – Dan G. McCartney, *James*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Baker Academic, 2009), 48

Hope for All

“The resurrection is indeed the hope of Israel, but it is not the hope only for Israel. The hope of Israel is the hope for gentiles as well.” - Brandon D. Crowe, *The Hope of Israel: The Resurrection of Christ in the Acts of the Apostles* (Baker Academic, 2020), 85

Comfort Over Truth? A Test Case

David Anguish

“You may not see the point of all this faith now,” [the headmaster] said. “But you will one day, when you start to lose loved ones.” I experienced a stab of sheer indignation . . . *Why, that would be as much as saying that religion might not be true, but never mind that, since it can be relied upon for comfort. . . .* — Christopher Hitchens (my emphasis).¹

Having affirmed ([issue 2/13](#)) that Scripture agrees that the only reason to believe anything is because it is true, we can ask what New Testament writers would have thought about statements like Hitchens’s. As a test case, we’ll consider a section of 1 Corinthians 15.

After reviewing the claim and evidence that Jesus had been raised (vv. 1-11), he exposes the failure of the counter claim that “there is no resurrection from the dead” (v. 12) with a series of propositions that show the inconsistency of that claim with the Corinthians’ profession of Christian faith (vv. 13-19). Verses 20-34 reaffirm his confidence and clarify the implications of resurrection against the backdrop of the conclusion, “If we have put our hope in Christ for this life only, we should be pitied more than anyone” (v. 19 CSB).

Verses 35-49 reply to modern sounding Corinthian objections rooted in a Greek philosophical outlook that could not fathom “how the dead are raised” or the “kind of body” a raised person will have (v. 35). In essence, they were saying resurrection *would not* occur because it *could not* occur.

The chapter concludes with an exhortation to triumphant faith grounded in confidence in the reality of resurrection (vv. 50-58).

With this context in mind, notice verses 29-32. Verse 29 again questions the Corinthians’ consistency: if they did not believe resurrection could happen, why go to the trouble of being baptized for the dead?² Paul adds his own experience in verses 30-32. If there is no resurrection, why should anyone

Timely, From Fifty Years Ago

“A person of conviction, however intelligent, sincere and humble he may be, will be fortunate if he escapes the charge of being a bigot. Nowadays the really great mind is thought to be both broad and open—broad enough to absorb every fresh idea which is presented to it, and open enough to go on doing so *ad infinitum*. . . .

“It is bad enough to be dogmatic, we are told. But ‘if you must be dogmatic’, our critics continue, ‘do at least keep your dogmatism to yourself. Hold your own definite convictions (if you insist), but leave other people alone in theirs. Be tolerant. Mind your own business, and let the rest of the world mind theirs.”

- John R. W. Stott, *Christ the Controversialist: A Study in Some Essentials of Evangelical Religion* (InterVarsity Press, 1970), 13, 17*

Resurrection’s Hope

“The bodily aspect of resurrection is important, because the difference between the alternative of only having the spirit live and having the entire person be renewed is part of what made Jewish and Christian resurrection hope, resurrection hope. To lack a bodily resurrection teaching is to teach in distinction from what the earliest church had received as a key element of the hope that Jesus left his followers, a hope that itself was rooted in Jewish precedent.” - Darrell L. Bock & Daniel B. Wallace, *Dethroning Jesus: Exposing Popular Culture’s Quest to Unseat the Biblical Christ* (Thomas Nelson, 2007), 210

* Reprinted 2013 as *Christ in Conflict: Lessons from Jesus and His Controversies*

live sacrificially, as he was? In modern terms, why not instead “grab for the gusto,” “live for the moment,” and “go out in a blaze of glory”? In Paul’s terms, “If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’” (v. 32).

We can amplify his argument, which ends by citing the language and philosophy of the Epicureans, as follows.

If for one moment I believed Christ was not raised and I will not be raised either, I would give up the sacrificial life I’ve been living—and the persecution that has come with it—and become an Epicurean. If our claim of resurrection is not *true*, I am better off giving my life over to pleasure and self-indulgence.

Among the things implied in Paul’s argument is that if his hope was not based on what was true, it didn’t matter how much “better” his altruistic, self-sacrificial life was. He should abandon Christian faith and follow a different way. Nor did it matter how much comfort he might derive from believing this world with its tears and troubles is not all there is. If Christ was not raised—and no one else will be either—there is no reason to believe. It isn’t *true*.

In a candid appraisal of his worldview that agrees with and expands on Hitchens’s point, atheistic existentialist Jean Sartre wrote,

God does not exist and . . . it is necessary to draw the consequences of his absence right to the end. . . . The existentialist . . . finds it extremely embarrassing that God does not exist, for there disappears with Him all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven. There can no longer be any good *a priori*, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it. It is nowhere written that “the good” exists, that one must be honest and not lie, since we are now upon the plane where there are only men. Dostoyevsky once wrote, “If God did not exist, everything would be permitted”; and that, for existentialism, is the very starting point. Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself. . . . Nor, on the other hand, if God does not exist, are we provided with any values or commands that could legitimise our behaviour.³

Based on 1 Corinthians 15, on this point at least, I’m convinced Paul would have agreed.

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Notes

¹ Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (Twelve Books, 2007), 3-4.

² Thankfully, we need not know the specific referent of this statement to see Paul’s point.

³ Jean-Paul Sartre, “Existential Atheism,” in William S. Sahakian, ed., *Philosophies of Religion* (Schenkman Publishing Company, Inc., 1965), 120-121.

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